

WHCOA Topic Area: Our Community
Issue: Older Americans Act Reauthorization

Overview of Current Issue Status: in 2005, the Older Americans Act (OAA) celebrates 40 years of enabling older Americans to live independently in their communities and avoid premature institutionalization. In 2006, the first of the 77 million baby boomers reach the age of 60 and boomers will redefine retirement and aging. The well-established Aging Network comprised of the federal Administration on Aging, 53 State Units on Aging, 655 Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), and 240 Title VI Native American aging programs in partnership with their local providers is committed to, and with adequate resources, capable of meeting the service demands of our aging nation.

Older Americans Act programs successfully target low-income, minority seniors, those in greatest social and economic need, and those in rural areas. Two dollars from other sources are leveraged for every \$1 of federal funds, and almost \$3 from other sources to \$1 of federal funds are leveraged for intensive in-home services, proving that the Aging Network is one of the most cost-effective and innovative components of the nation's long-term care system. In 2002, Older Americans Act programs provided 141,958,732 home-delivered meals; 108,333,836 congregate meals; 11,014,037 hours of personal care and homemaker services; and 2,412,748 rides.

Challenges: Since 1980, there has been a substantial loss in the Older Americans Act program's capacity at the state and community levels to provide services due to increasing numbers of older adults requesting services over a longer life-span, larger numbers of frail older persons who need more extensive services, and rising costs of inflation. Further, the Older Americans Act needs many reforms to modernize it to include acknowledgment of and support for family caregivers, to provide parity for rural and urban areas.

Resolution:

Reauthorize the Older Americans Act within the first six months following the 2005 White House Conference on Aging.

Increase authorization levels for all of the titles of the Older Americans Act by a minimum of 25%, assuring necessary resources to adequately serve the projected growth in the numbers of older Americans, particularly the growing ranks of the old-old, those age 85+, who are the most frail, vulnerable and in the greatest need for supportive services.

Allow for the maximum amount of flexibility in the allocation of resources and the provision of services under Title III in order for Area Agencies on Aging and Title VI Native American Agencies to most efficiently and effectively meet the growing and changing needs in their own community.

Create a new title within the reauthorization of the Older Americans Act to authorize State Units on Aging, Area Agencies on Aging and Title VI Native Americans Agencies to prepare for the aging of the baby boomers, fostering livable communities that enable older Americans to be independent with housing, transportation, and opportunities for civic engagement available to them.

Expand Title III-E to allow agencies to serve grandparents and older adults who are providing care to adult children with disabilities, and change the definition of “kinship” in the National Family Caregiver Support Program (NFCSP) to also include non-blood relationships.

Double the initial \$125 million for the NFCSP and develop public/private partnerships aimed at better supporting and educating caregivers, especially senior and spousal caregivers and long-distance caregivers who benefit from this vital program.

Reinstate the income disregard for social security benefits and recognize the historical value of public service under Title V.

Include a provision under Title V of the Act that would require a comprehensive study of current and future senior employment needs to recommend procedures to coordinate programs to best promote and support the recruitment, training and retention of the growing ranks of older adults who wish to remain employed;

Increase the authorization of Title VII provisions and services to enhance the Aging Network’s capacity to increase training of law enforcement officials and medical staff, broaden public education and community involvement campaigns that are culturally appropriate, and facilitate coordination among all professionals and volunteers involved with the prevention, detection, intervention and treatment of abuse and neglect of vulnerable older adults.

Include statutory language in the Older Americans Act that increases support to the Aging Network to promote senior mobility, expand cost-effective options, and facilitate coordination of human services transportation.

Create under Title IV of the Act a National Education and Training/Certification Program for Area Agency on Aging and Title VI Native American directors and aspiring directors that would reinforce and broaden the capacity of Aging Network leaders to meet the needs of a culturally diverse older population.

Support educational training and geriatrics in the health and social services professions.

Create a new subtitle to permanently authorize Aging and Disability Resource Centers within every planning and service area in the nation giving Area Agencies on Aging the right of first refusal to be designated as the Aging and Disability Resource Center within their service area.